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THE UNMET PROBLEMS OF THE VILLAGE CHURCH

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Introduction

This paper is based upon 150 replies to a questionnaire sent by Agricultural Missions, Inc. to rural missionaries in 37 countries. A further source is the field studies of the International Missionary Council. The personal convictions of men and women, representing many missionary societies, arising from long experience with rural missionary work are recorded upon many of the as-yet-unsolved problems which face Christian missions. It should be kept in mind that all the problems dealt with do not equally apply to every mission field and that there is scarcely a problem which has not in some measure been successfully met in some part of the missionary world.

I

Background Resources*

"The indigenous church and not the foreign mission is the focal point of the missionary strategy." .....C. W. Ransom.

1. There are today at least 135,305 organized and unorganized Protestant churches in mission lands. Of this number about 90% may be classified as rural churches. (The term rural is applied to a community having up to 15,000 population.)

2. Connected with these churches are 14,339,989 Christians, including communicant members, baptized persons, and persons under regular Christian instruction. Of this number upwards of 80% are rural people.

3. The ordained pastors, unordained evangelists, and Bible women serving these churches total 106,373. Of these probably 90% are working in the rural areas.

4. There are 110,861 teachers and educational workers, of whom about 90% are employed in rural work.

II

Unmet Problems

1. Trained Leadership - Getting It and Keeping It.

More than one hundred of the 150 rural missionaries replying to the

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* These estimates are compiled from Parker's Interpretative Statistical Survey of the World Mission of the Christian Church, which was prepared for the Madras Conference in 1938. An increase of 10% above these figures has been used to allow for the growth of the Christian movement during the ten years' interval since they were compiled.

questionnaire named the lack of trained leaders, missionaries, paid national workers and lay workers as the bottle neck that is holding up advance in the rural Christian program.

"Only the trained leader can deal with the complex situations the rural worker meets, situations -- technical, cultural, psychological and spiritual. The missionary has hundreds of years of Christian civilization in his background; the African has, at most, only a generation of Christian background. The missionary must be prepared to allow for this discrepancy. The Rural Missionary should be a trained teacher; whatever he does, his task is to teach someone." - **Belgian Congo.**

"Our experience is that the village community program will only work effectively if a separate group of people are trained for it." - Sierra Leone.

"Very few mission workers who are in intimate, close, regular contact with village people are rurally trained. More missionaries should take the one year course that Cornell offers and more persons with technical, agricultural and rural preparation should go into mission work in the villages." - India.

"No missionary should be allowed on this field who doesn't have the mastery of at least one trade." - Jamaica.

"The greatest difficulty facing rural missions today is lack of sufficient trained and consecrated staff both European and African." - S. Rhodesia.

"Well trained men and women workers are simply non-existant." - India.

"We have a great lack of trained workers with a vision and know-how of what can be done in a rural community." - W. China.

"Rural indigenous leadership training is urgent since independent India has arrived." - India

Every great secular enterprise, with an international outreach -- banking, oil, manufacturing, diplomatic service -- puts its representatives through an intensive, specialized training to prepare them for the field conditions which they will meet. The world mission of the church which is by far the most delicate and difficult task of our age will succeed by the use of the same strategy.

2. The Problem of the Loss of Rurally Trained Workers to the Village Program.

"I attended the special course for missionaries at Cornell two years ago, expecting to take up rural evangelistic work to which I was appointed in the United Provinces of India, but at Cairo on my way out I received a cable changing my appointment. It became necessary on arrival to carry the mission Treasurer's and Secretary's work and I haven't had a day to spend in direct village work." - India.

"Some of us had the idea before coming to the field that missionaries visited the people in their homes, conducted evangelistic services, etc., but arriving on the field we found we had institutions or organizations that demand so much time and energy to supervise the work of schools, shops, boarding homes, check and recheck, make our reports, talk palavers, repair buildings and put up new ones, etc., that for long periods we do not have the time to get to the outlying villages or into the homes of the people nearby." - Sierra Leone.

"I do not think I can serve my purpose in coming to India by devoting so much time to administrative responsibilities. I am surrounded by great resources for specializing in rural training and instruction. My time is so consumed, I regret, with current problems that too little use can be made of these resources." - India.

"Twenty years ago there were eleven trained agricultural missionaries in India. Today, of that group, I am the only one left. All the others have fallen out, either have left India or have entered other work in which their missions and national churches were more interested. They simply could not get the financial support needed for doing a significant agricultural job." - India.

3. Christian Strategy and the Village- Competition of Institutional and Administrative Work.

Very many of the questionnaire replies ask how Christian rural work can win the respect, vital interest and backing of the mission and of the National Church leaders in their overall strategy.

"When the church became independent, the task fell to the national leaders who, like the rest of the people in this part of the world, were city-minded. Even when we supervised the village schools, they served as feeders for the city high schools and did not allow for special education adapted to the village. Our village churches have suffered all the way. Some of us have spent much time in helping the Evangelical Synod work out programs for the rural churches, but so far, though conscious of their failure, they are content to 'take it out in talk'." - Lebanon.

"This work is always secondary to higher education in all our mission meetings and discussions." - India.

"Rural missions have been shouldered out of the mission budgets by big schools, colleges, hospitals and other institutions primarily concerned with or located in the cities. Personnel and funds stop before they reach the rural areas." - China.

"There is a lack of understanding in the mission and among our national leaders as to the nature, importance and needs of rural work. The mission gives us its blessing, but not its funds." - South India.

"The cooperation of mission and national colleagues is good, except for a few who hold the purse strings." - S. China.

"Our mission colleagues are interested in general, but each is too busy with his own program to cooperate. Each is going his own way without any integration of program." - Thailand.

"On the mission field it is easy to fall into the 'rut' of the easier way of doing things. When a mission becomes so top-heavy with administration, administrative machinery and committees that it considers a policy but never takes any action on the policy, it is hopeless.....We as a mission gave up our Industrial or Craft School and almost all of our farm schools to concentrate on preparing students for 'white collar' jobs and I believe we have miserably failed there." - India.

4. Self Support and Extension of the Witness of the Church.

"Church life and self support can be considered separately only on paper. Christian witness, the growth of the church, the improvement of its economic position and development of its indigenous maintenance go right along together." - Portuguese East Africa.

The number one problem of the task of extending Christianity among rural people is "How to devise a type of church organization, program and leadership which, on the one hand, can adequately minister to their needs and, on the other hand, can be supported by their economic resources." - R. A. Felton.

Christian missions have brought an expensive type of church and way of life to under-privileged people. The western church is geared to a high standard of living and to a middle class economy. Missions have planted this church, with its costly institutions, in subsistence economy societies in which there is hardly a middle class. A church is to be built, organized and operated; a trained pastor and family to be supported; school fees, books, better clothing, more food, new amenities and contacts with the outer world; in short, a higher standard of living is required. The villagers live close to the land. Their income is mostly in kind; they handle little cash. There is no place in the community for a non-productive family. A village church to become indigenous must be a land-based church and fit into a land economy.

"As the church carries its witness to new areas, are these being organized in such a way that the new Christians depend from the beginning upon their own resources? And are we helping them to such an abundant life as to make this possible?"

The organization of a church and its support are not goals in themselves, but rather first steps in the Christian witness of a congregation. These are but instruments for extending the Gospel to others. Christian stewardship is more than tithing or the practice of the Lord's Acre. It is a dedication of life, time, energies and interests, as well as income, to the

Lord. Stewardship is a spiritual discipline of which church self-support is but one natural result and evangelizm and church extension the finest fruit.

5. An Effective Village Program Requires Workers Who Live in the Village and Make It a Life Job. Continuity of Effort is Absolutely Essential.

"Such a program requires skilled, devoted and sustained leadership over a number of years. Brief ministries are able to build the church as an institution, but to build Christian rural communities takes patience to let the purposes of God unfold." - India.

"A church worker can no more get lasting results from intermittent visits to the village than could a setting hen that had to answer the door-bell." - China.

"To rebuild the life of a village can't be done in a short time. It can't be done by occasional auto trips from the city. You must live with the villagers until you are no longer considered an outsider. To sell your religion to villagers, you must sell yourself, and you can't sell yourself and live in a mission compound." - China.

"City pulpits and city careers have become the coveted goals of our ministry and of our trained workers. This has tended to the result that a second hand leadership is in the village Christian work." - India.

"Ministers must wish to go into rural work as a life job and refuse to leave it for fairer parishes in city areas. They must be willing to ride long distances on bicycles in all kinds of weather and be able to talk with the farmers in their own language and understand their life interests." - Japan.

"Our chief difficulty in rural work is the continual shifting of workers to other fields, making impossible the continuity needed in policy and operation." - Mexico.

"For fifteen years we were shifted nearly every year from place to place to substitute for people on furlough. We could not put in our roots anywhere." - Sierra Leone.

"The head of a small group of Indian Christian villagers in the United Provinces told me, 'We are like men sailing down a river with our feet in each of two canoes. When the evangelist or missionary visits us, we step into one canoe; when he has gone, we put our foot back in the other canoe. How can we be truly Christian when we are alone in a Hindu village all but a part of one day a month?'" - India.

"We need men and women of high training and abilities who really are willing to come and live in rural centers. I am told that the graduates of our college would never consent to go and serve in such lonely places.

Our educated Indian people must catch the spirit of service and sacrifice and not see what salary they can get or what conveniences they can be given." - India.

"It is very hard to find workers who are happy among rural people who have the technical skill required to meet their needs." - China.

The problem of life in the village for trained nationals is closely related to that of the rural missionary. Many of the hazards to life and health, the lack of amenities and comforts and the loneliness that stand between the Western worker and village life are present with the trained national. However, the problem has been successfully met by a few missionaries in many fields. "Modern developments in transportation, inoculation and preventive medicine, screening of houses, sanitary ingenuity, methods of cooling and guarding of food and drinking water, and the use of radio have gone far toward meeting the major hazards of village life." (Belgian Congo) The trained national finds the example of the compound missionary a natural one to follow and he will be reluctant to make sacrifices that the missionary does not make.

6. Discovery of Motivations.

An unmet problem of the village is how to discover the mainsprings of action and motivations of the villagers and release them in new and constructive lines. Three-fourths of the questionnaire replies from rural workers named the apathy, indifference and conservatism of the villagers as their "number one problem."

Psychologists tell us that it is doubtful whether the average person draws upon more than one tenth of his latent physical, mental and spiritual powers. It is the job of the Christian rural worker to discover, unlock and put into action the unsuspected reserves of power that are stored away in the villager.

Among the many mainsprings of action of the backward villager, we will name but three:

a) The Land.

Land is the key to the rural problem. It is the farmer's source of life. He is linked to it by daily toil, by affection, by tradition and religion. Land limits his horizon and bounds his past and his future. The Christian approach to the man on the land is a lever for lifting his entire life, his outlook and his conception of himself and of his Creator. This approach holds the keys to health, energy, self-respect, hope and economic improvement -- in short, a new level of living. These, in turn, lead to a desire for new values, including the abundant life and spiritual realities that Jesus promised. The Christian rural mission is incomparably equipped, as Communism is not, to interpret the total life values that center in the land.

"We found in the land of our hacienda the mainsprings of action and redemption of our forty apathetic peon families. These mainsprings had lain dormant in them and their ancestors for four hundred years. We freed our peons, gave each family a title to a small farm of their own, trained them in its use, in home making and the care and education of their children. A new respect and hope were born with a new reason for living. A foundation for Christian discipleship, for a Christian community and a Christian church was laid. After ten years, the church has 200 members." - Bolivia.

b) The Home, Family and Child.

To perpetuate the family and to guard its welfare are among the strongest motivations in human society. The ministry to the family and the child is at the heart of Christ's teachings and it accords with some of the deepest values of non-Christian peoples.

"The gospel of the dignity, supreme worth, and immortal destiny of the child as a child of God opens a natural pathway for the whole family to Christian discipleship." - China.

c) Nationalism.

On practically every mission field of the world, the people have awakened to the reality of their own powers and to the craving for self-determination.

"Nationalism means that the people want to do it themselves. Our opportunity is to use this force in the right way to build the church and the community. Here is a chance to demonstrate a better way than Communism to a worthy and happy life -- a way through Jesus Christ, His redemption and His real care for our lives and our needs." Bali, Netherlands East Indies.

"The people will work tremendously hard and sacrifice for a church of their own, when they will be half-hearted about a project that is organized, led and supported by outsiders." - India.

7. Using the Cultural Patterns of the Village.

"We must unclothe Christian principles of our Western culture and let the Chinese clothe them in their own culture." - China.

"To thrust upon Africans Christian rules of conduct that have not grown out of their own convictions is more likely to breed hypocrites than to unravel perplexities." - Portuguese East Africa.

"With the Huastica Indians, we use as much as possible their own life patterns, viz., the whole family is the object of evangelism and is regularly visited for ten days at a time, during two or more years. The family, joined by other families, becomes the nucleus of a church. The traditional council of old men controls the church. It appoints committees for finances,

for the inner life and problems of the church and for evangelism. Church support, aimed at from the start, is a group project, using the Lord's Acre plan on communal land. The tribal agricultural festivals are now Christian." - Mexico.

8. The Breakup of Village Life and the Attractions of Urban Life.

The social and economic structure of the villages of the non-Christian world is breaking up. Rapidly in many parts of Africa, more slowly in Asia and in Latin America, the old order is everywhere disintegrating. "My friend, I am a Christian, but you will pardon me if I talk frankly with you. The White Man has broken the tribe, and it is my belief that it cannot be mended again, that the house that is broken and the man that falls apart when the house is broken cannot be mended again. The tragedy is not that they are broken; the tragedy is that they are not mended again. There are some White men who give their lives to build up what is broken, but they are not enough." From CRY,THE BELOVED COUNTRY, Alan Paton - South Africa.

"A majority of the men pass the greater part of their lives away from their homes. The whole life of the villages is tuned to this absenteeism. The result is that the burden of farming and village life falls on the women." - Portuguese East Africa.

The city has an irresistible pull upon the village. "Our Christian youth are leaving the villages for the cities and few of them ever return." - Sumatra.

"Most of the traffic lights between urban and rural areas are set toward the city."

"Fifty years ago this church was started in Panotla village; the young people have gone to the urban centers and have not returned. The church members are largely old people. The village remains the same depressed community of a generation ago and the church is largely supported by the mission." - Mexico.

Missions not infrequently help to disintegrate the life of the village. Our Copper Belt Commission questioned hundreds of Bantu men who were at work upon the railway and in the towns and mines of Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo as to why they were away from their families. They replied, "To pay for the tuition of our children in the Mission schools and to pay the government tax." These long absences separate the men from their homes with resulting loss in community morale and agriculture. - Report of Copper Belt Commission, I.M.C.

"We are losing many of our educated Christian workers in the villages from the very much higher salaries offered by business and government employ." - Northern Rhodesia.

"Our mission schools draw our young people to the cities, although their training and influence are greatly needed in the rural districts. Parents send their children to our schools to help them get away from the farm." - Brazil.

"Commerce, modern industry, taxes, government and missions have been atomizing Bantu communal society. The church alone through its teachings, and its various activities can lead up the long road to a new social responsibility which can 'put Humpty Dumpty together again'." - Portuguese East Africa.

"The African is bewildered when the mission deals with him through educational, medical, social, economic and spiritual departments. To the African, all these things are inseparable. Every African considers himself an economist, a politician, a member of a group with social duties and a religionist." - Gold Coast.

9. The Problem of Village Youth.

Village life needs a program of activities which will challenge the imagination, interests, heroism and idealism of youth. Such a program must offer an outlet for the use of the school training youth has received. "Service groups and age groups, such as 4-H Clubs, young farmers' clubs, village improvement clubs, Boy Scouts, Evangelistic teams, mothers' clubs for home improvement, child care and improved diet and cooking, men's groups, old men's palaver and discussion groups -- all such activities are carried on." - Cuba.

10. A New Integration Is Necessary.

Rural man sees life as a whole and nothing less than a comprehensive approach to his problems can rebuild his life.

"The Gospel of Christianity is as relevant as it ever has been; but it must be brought to bear on all of life, instead of being just a personal church experience." - Puerto Rico.

"The main need of South African Christianity today is a program which will not content itself with church meetings only, but will relate its gospel and therefore its worship and witness to the whole life of the people. Integration of the whole gospel with the whole of life is the need. Very few of our Christian workers see any connection between the gospel and the soil." - South Africa.

"It is futile to undertake an advance in any single phase of the community's life. Such a salient is apt to be sloughed off unless there is progress all along the line to support it, -- economic, agricultural, social and religious, as well as health. Sound progress requires the integration of the various services in the program of rural development." - D. N. Forman.